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Barclay, P.

The growth of corn

Edinburgh

1887

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THE

GROWTH OF CORN

Professor John Stuart Black

"THEY SHALL REVIVE AS THE CORN."

P.B.

308

Z

Box 106

BY THE

REV. P. BARCLAY, M.A.



EDINBURGH:

ANDREW STEVENSON, 9 NORTH BANK STREET.

1887.

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Box 106

THE
GROWTH OF CORN.

BY THE
REV. P. BARCLAY, M.A.

Thou visitest the earth and waterest it,
Thou greatly enrichest it;
The river of God is full of water;
Thou providest them corn, when Thou hast so prepared the earth.
Thou waterest her furrows abundantly;
Thou settlest the ridges thereof;
Thou makest it soft with showers;
Thou blessest the springing thereof;
Thou crownest the year with Thy goodness,
And Thy paths drop fatness.

PSALM LXV. 9-11 (Revised Version).

EDINBURGH:
ANDREW STEVENSON, 9 NORTH BANK STREET.
1887.

Domestic House and
Garden to a large
Pamphlet - "The
British - Vita."
Edinburgh
20:9:87.

Anonymous. fjs
35.22

DEDICATED,
WITH ALL RESPECT,
TO THOSE WHO TILL THE GROUND,
BY ONE WHO HAS BEEN, IN VARIOUS PLACES,
THEIR "SERVANT FOR JESUS' SAKE"—
"CHRIST JESUS THE LORD."
2 COR. iv. 5.

"Moreover, the profit of the earth is for all: the king himself is served by the field."—ECCLES. v. 9.

"It is the tiller of the ground that keeps
The world in life, and makes it what it is.
Poor as he may be, from his daily sweat
The wealth of nations spring, and his rough hands
Wield sceptres, steer our navies, and command
Our armies, sign our treaties, make our laws,
Sheathe or unsheathe the sword, to overthrow
Or reconstruct the empires of the earth."
My Old Letters, by HORATIUS BONAR, D.D.

Oct. 18, 1886.

MY DEAR FRIENDS,—You sometimes complain of being neglected by ministers, and I am sure that your complaint is often not without truth. But might not ministers complain of being neglected by you? How seldom many of you come to any church! There is room for mutual improvement; even though from having to prepare for the pulpit, and from other duties laid on them, ministers may not be able to visit quite so much as you might expect them to do.

May God, by His Grace, draw us nearer to Himself, and so nearer to one another in Christ Jesus!

Your servant in Him, our common Lord,

P. BARCLAY.

EDINBURGH, *September 1886.*

Sow in the morn thy seed,
At eve hold not thy hand :
To doubt and fear give thou no heed,
Broad-cast it o'er the land.

Thou canst not toil in vain :
Cold, heat, and moist, and dry
Shall foster and mature the grain
For garners in the sky.

And duly shall appear
In beauty, verdure, strength,
The tender blade, the stalk, the ear
And the full corn at length.

Hence when the glorious end,
The day of God, is come,
The angel reapers shall descend,
And Heaven cry, "Harvest-home."
—MONTGOMERY.



THE GROWTH OF CORN.

And He said, So is the Kingdom of God, as if a man should cast seed into the ground ;

And should sleep, and rise night and day, and the seed should spring and grow up, he knoweth not how.

For the earth bringeth forth fruit of herself ; first the blade, then the ear ; after that the full corn in the ear.

But when the fruit is brought forth, immediately he putteth in the sickle, because the harvest is come.

ST MARK IV. 26-29.



WE have here a very beautiful parable, setting forth the establishing of the kingdom of God, and the manner of its growth. The lessons of God's grace are here illustrated by pictures from God's providence. To most minds such lessons are more instructive than bare statements of the truth. For thus the truth is seen as well as heard. And of all teachers the Lord Jesus Christ, the Teacher sent from God (though much more than that) might have said, "I have used similitudes."¹

Every season of the year might give us such pictures, were we only more alive to observe them. Every day we might have special lessons in God's school from His

¹ Hosea x. 12.

Books of Creation and Providence and illustrations of His Book of Grace.

"These as they change, Almighty Father, these
Are but the varied God.* The rolling year
Is full of Thee. Forth in the pleasing spring
Thy beauty walks, Thy tenderness and love.

"Then comes Thy glory in the summer months,
With light and heat refulgent. Then Thy sun
Shoots full perfection through the swelling year,
And oft Thy voice in dreadful thunder speaks.

"Thy bounty shines in autumn unconfined,
And spreads a common feast for all that lives.

"In winter, awful Thou, with clouds and storms
Around Thee thrown, tempest o'er tempest rolled,
Majestic darkness, on the whirlwind's wing
Riding sublime, Thou bidd'st the world adore,
And humblest nature with Thy northern blast.

"God is ever present, ever felt,
In the void waste as in the city full;
And where He vital breathes, there must be joy."¹

¹ Thomson's
"Seasons."

But as it is possible for a man to walk abroad in a dreamy kind of way without seeing many objects that are around his path, in like manner many walk through the world spiritually blind or nearly so. They see not, as they ought, those manifestations of greatness and of

* "Varied God"—not making Nature and God one and the same. It means that God makes Himself known through the seasons of the year in various ways.

But this making known of Himself is not sufficient for us in our character as sinners; as such, we need to know Him in the way of His grace—i. e. in and through the Lord Jesus Christ.

power, of wisdom and of goodness, which they might see in the heavens above and in the earth beneath, in the sun and the moon and the stars,¹ in the mountains and in the valleys, in the rivers and in the sea, in the fruits and in the flowers, in "fire and hail, snow and vapours, stormy wind fulfilling His word, mountains and all hills, fruitful trees and all cedars, beasts and all cattle, creeping things and flying fowl."²

¹ Ps. viii.; xix.

² Ps. cxlviii.
8-10.

"These are Thy glorious works, Parent of good,
Almighty! Thine this universal frame,
Thus wondrous fair: Thyself how wondrous then!
Unspeakable, who sitt'st above these heavens
To us invisible, or dimly seen
In these Thy lowest works; yet these declare
Thy goodness beyond thought, and power divine."³

³ Milton's
"Paradise
Lost."

"The invisible things of God from the creation of the world are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made, even His eternal power and Godhead."⁴ But they are not seen by them; for they have shut their eyes, and turned aside from the great God of heaven and earth, and so they do not learn to sing His praise: "O LORD, how manifold are Thy works! in wisdom hast Thou made them all: the earth is full of Thy riches. So is this great and wide sea."⁵ His glory is made known in all created things. But it needs the child-like heart and the enlightened understanding to receive that knowledge. Then, in the voice of all creation, I may hear the voice of the uncreated God, my Father and my Lord. Apart from this I may admire the work, and yet pay no regard to the Worker,— "worshipping and serving the creature rather than the Creator, who is blessed for ever. Amen."⁶

⁴ Rom. i. 20.
(R. V.)

Having no ear for *sermons without words*, they do not rise up, as they might otherwise do, from nature to nature's God. They do not worship Him, "making melody in their heart unto the Lord:"¹ "The glory of the LORD shall endure for ever: the LORD shall rejoice in His works. He looketh on the earth, and it trembleth: He toucheth the hills, and they smoke. I will sing unto the LORD as long as I live: I will sing praise unto my God while I have my being. My meditation of Him shall be sweet: I will be glad in the LORD."²

¹ Eph. v. 19.² Ps. civ. 31-34.

"If God thy inmost soul and being share,
The universe becomes thy book of prayer."³

³ Thohuck.

Such being their condition, they cannot in the works of creation and of providence see illustrations of His grace. The Book that tells of His grace is little read and less thought upon. And yet what is the chief end of that Book which the merciful God hath given? Is it not this:—

"That so men's sons his deeds may know,
His kingdom's grace that doth excel!"⁴

⁴ Ps. cxlv. 12 (metre).

The Lord Jesus Christ gives us many such pictures, that He may draw us to consider and receive the truths which they make plain. Let us not halt with admiring the picture; let us see that the truth it presents to the eye may be implanted in the heart. The shell may be beautiful, let us find the kernel; the shadow may be fair, the Lord enable us to grasp the substance!

Let us now turn to the truth set forth in these verses from the Gospel according to St Mark. But I cannot enter into the various meanings of the expression, "The

Kingdom of God." To do this might not tend to edification, and it would certainly take too much time. My end in writing this tract is to give some plain and practical lessons, which may be useful to those to whom it is inscribed.

One application then of these verses is to the implanting and the gradual growth of God's authority in our hearts—the sowing of good seed, and its coming to ripeness in gracious principles and in holiness of life. Alike in the kingdom of nature and of grace, the most wonderful effects are often brought about by the quietest means—such as the undiscerning and unspiritual eye cannot perceive. Strange things are done in chemistry and by electricity, and not less strange in the workings of God's grace. A breath in an Alpine valley may bring down a mountain of snow, and a breath of the Spirit of God can create a Pentecost.¹ The result is seen, while¹ Acts ii. 1. of the means and agencies we know but little. The kingdom of God will make its presence known, but "it cometh not with observation."²

² Luke xvii. 20.

"Our Father which art in heaven,
Hallowed be Thy Name:
THY KINGDOM COME:
THY WILL BE DONE IN EARTH, AS IT IS IN HEAVEN:
Give us this day our daily bread,
And forgive us our debts, as we forgive our debtors.
And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil:
For thine is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory,
for ever. Amen."³





I.

MAN AND HIS WORK.



THE first step in the process, as given in the parable here, is the casting in of the seed: "As if a man should cast seed into the ground." There must be a Divine agency, but it is the human that is here spoken of. And so a John the Baptist must come to preach the necessity of faith and repentance,¹ and to point to the "Lamb of God, which taketh away the sin of the world."² And Christ must come in the flesh, and His work, as far as the ministration of the gospel of His grace is concerned, must be continued by living men. They should be of one spirit with Him,³ and in full sympathy with their fellow-men.

"The field is the world."⁴ Do not look at a distance for some vague, wicked thing which you denounce as the world. You may be—you are part of the world, and in some cases, perhaps, not the best part of it. You are the man to cast in the seed, and sinful human nature, your own, or that of those to whom by any means you can reach, is the field. You see that it is not very far away from you.

When you consider the unkindly soil on which you

have to work, and your want of ability and knowledge, it will be best for you to begin this husbandry by entering into firm friendship with One who is willing and able to help you. Apart from Him,¹ indeed, as He tells you Himself, you will make little, and certainly no real, progress.

This is the Man Christ Jesus, who came from God and went to God,—went by the cross and the grave to the Mighty Presence, that such friendship might be possible, and that we receiving it might not only be God's husbandry but fellow-workers with Him in that husbandry.² So great is His love towards sinners of mankind! "God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in Him should not perish, but have everlasting life."³

Baptised into His name, you are bound to all this by the promises then made in your behalf. You call yourselves Christians, and, it may be, you go to His Holy Table. But what will all this avail, if under God you are not working for your own salvation and for that of others? Yea, more, even by the law of Creation you are bound to listen to any message from Him who is the Creator of heaven and of earth. And earnestly listening to this message, you naturally begin to fall in with His plans and purposes—you sow the seed in yourselves and others. By and by, if not all at once, it takes root and grows. And others may help to sow it in you. The word of God is the seed sown: "He that soweth the good seed is the Son of Man:"⁴ "The sower soweth the world."⁵

If you do not thus act, there can be no growth. You may call yourself a farmer, and may say you have been

¹ Matt. iii. 2.

² John i. 29.

³ 2 Tim. ii. 1.

⁴ Matt. xiii. 38.

² 1 Cor. iii. 9.

³ John iii. 16.

⁴ Matt. xiii. 37.

⁵ Mark iv. 4.

sowing seed. People will not believe you, although you may deceive them and yourselves for a time. By and by they will tell you that you have never learned your trade, or, if you have learned it, that you are working at it in a very careless way.

In the spring season your granary is full of seed. What good will it do to leave it there? Without, it may be, thinking much about it, you put faith in the God of nature, and scatter the seed over your field. And in due time you gather in the produce. But in the granary it cannot lay hold on the soil, or be subjected to the genial influences of the rain and sunshine. These influences may be acting on the soil, but not having received the seed it can bring forth no fruit. It will the more readily bring forth weeds, especially if you broke up the fallow-ground¹ with the intention of sowing seed. Perhaps it was hard work to break up the fallow-ground, and you were tired and weary after it. But good cultivation requires it. The thorns have to be stubbed up, and the nettles and the knot-grass must at least to some extent be rooted out. You put forth the strength which God has given you, and root them up and burn them and get them out of your way. Then the sowing should go on at once, and the thorns and thistles would have little chance of coming up again. For the land needs labour, and the labourer must subdue it in the sweat of his brow.

In like manner, you may have a form of religion, and in some ways that which seems a little more than a form. But unless you "prepare your heart to seek the Lord,"² what the better are you? For "an honest and good heart"³—that is, a heart which "trembles at the

¹ Jer. iv. 3.

² 2 Chron. xii.

14.

³ Luke viii. 15.

word of the Lord"¹—is the only soil in which the good seed will take root, and bring forth fruit. And then

you must sow, and let others sow that seed with all diligence, just as the farmer scatters his corn over the fields. For your Bibles, cast aside and neglected, cannot do you any good. The dews of God's Spirit may be descending, and the Sun of righteousness may be pouring forth His warm and life-giving rays, but your heart, thus left to itself, remains barren and fruitless. It will, under such influences, rather cast out abominable things.² "For the earth which drinketh in the rain that cometh oft upon it, and bringeth forth herbs meet for them by whom it is dressed, receiveth blessing from God: but that which beareth thorns and briers is rejected, and is nigh unto cursing, whose end is to be burned."³

Hence the sowing of the seed is very necessary, if you are to have any crop. And then there must be no saving of the seed or any lack of care in putting it into the ground. For the heart of man is bad soil, or rather good soil sadly spoiled. In some cases it is cold and ungenial like unworkable clay, in others hard and rocky and seemingly good for nothing. It is often like sour undrained land, where worthless roots and weeds, which are neither annuals nor biennials, are matted together. It is generally very foul, although its foulness may not be always visible. In few cases, if any, does it present a field very favourable for cultivation. The growth is often very slow. But provision has been made for its cultivation by One who is able to make such provision. And He has said that He will help you,—nay more, that He will be the chief Cultivator Himself. And so you may as well be friends with Him,

¹ Ezra ix. 4.

² Matt. xv. 19;
Ps. xiv. 1.

³ Heb. vi. 7-8.

and ask His help. In every case labour and care are needed if the heart is to be renewed and to be made fruitful in every good work; if we are to make any progress, through the grace of God, in "doing justly, in loving mercy, in walking humbly with our God;"¹ "in denying our wills, in ruling our tongues, in softening and sweetening our tempers, in mortifying our lusts; in learning patience, meekness, purity, forgiveness of injuries, and continuance in well-doing."

In this way you are to work, as "labouring together with God," and under His guidance and direction. You are not to make a hard bargain with Him, such as men often make when they agree to work together, each doing his part. In such a bargain your part would be very badly done, if done at all. It is never wise to act thus with Him. For He is the God of mercy and of might, who worketh both to will and to do of His good pleasure in as many as bow the knee in the name of Jesus, and confess that He is LORD to the glory of God the Father. And then you cannot fail of success.

In this husbandry you must be careful as to the seed you sow. For in these days, in many books, newspapers, and serials, even in books about religion, there is more than enough of bad seed, which the devil and his servants, sometimes disguised as angels of light,² take care to sow in many a heart. In the atmosphere of "this present evil world"³ and in the sinful heart,⁴ climate and soil are both favourable for his working. But give him no help in this or in any other way. Be ye sure that you sow good seed, the word of God, that "word which liveth and abideth for ever."⁵ It has power, and under all heavenly influences it will take root, and

¹ *Mi sh* vi. 1.

² *2 Cor.* ii. 11; xi. 14.

³ *Gal.* i. 4.

⁴ *Matt.* xv. 19.

⁵ *1 Pet.* i. 23.

grow and bring forth "first the blade, then the ear: after that, the full corn in the ear."

And lose no time in beginning this work, if you have not already begun it. If you have begun it, then carry it on earnestly. Remember your children and all over whom you have any influence, and, as far as you can, get before the devil in ploughing and in sowing seed. For whether you are busy or not, he is always busy—the busiest husbandman in all the world. Watch for favourable opportunities and do not forget this precept: "In the morning sow thy seed, and in the evening withhold not thy hand."¹ Yet do not say as an excuse for carelessness and delay, that you are watching for such times and seasons. For then this might be true of you: "He that observeth the wind shall not sow; and he that regardeth the clouds shall not reap."² You tell me that the work is difficult; but what work worth doing is not difficult? Consider what depends on the doing of it, and go at it in dependence on the grace of God.

Perhaps you will say, just as farmers are telling us that in these times nothing is to be made of farming, that it does not pay to grow corn of this kind. This is an old story: "What is the Almighty that we should serve Him? and what profit should we have if we pray unto Him?"³ It is one much acted on in every age, even by many who call themselves Christians. But it is wholly wrong. For it does pay even in this present time, and much more in the future. "Godliness is profitable unto all things, having promise of the life that now is, and of that which is to come."⁴

The seed may be sown in various forms. Kind

¹ *Eccles.* xi. 6.

² *Eccles.* xi. 4.

³ *Job* xxi. 15.

⁴ *1 Tim.* iv. 8.

looks, and loving thoughts and good works of every sort* may be at once the seed corn and the fruit. For in this husbandry it is well that the sower should carry the seed, not as those who sow generally do in a sheet or in a sowing-machine, but within himself, even in his heart. Alas! there are so-called Christian men and Christian ministers who are little better than sowing-machines—void of feeling, tenderness and love—into which they are content to put any kind of seed. There need be no wonder if the untilled field, receiving such seed, becomes worse rather than better, bringing forth weeds in abundance rather than the fruits of righteousness.

"Sow to yourselves in righteousness, reap in mercy," saith the LORD, "break up your fallow ground, for it is time to seek the LORD till He come and rain righteousness upon you."¹ What good can you find in ploughing wickedness and in reaping iniquity? Will not such conduct be your ruin? And even if you bethink yourselves and turn to a better husbandry, will it not make that husbandry much more difficult and less profitable? It is sometimes said that young men must sow their wild oats, and that thereafter they will become good, quiet, and religious people. No doubt, when their passions

* "Sowing in the morning, sowing deeds of kindness,
Sowing in the noontide, and the dewy eves :
Waiting for the harvest, and the time of reaping,
We shall come rejoicing, bringing in the sheaves !

"Sowing in the sunshine, sowing in the shadows,
Fearing neither clouds, nor winter's chilling breeze :
By and by the harvest, and the labour ended,
We shall come rejoicing, bringing in the sheaves !"

¹ Hosea x. 12.

cool down, they may become quiet and respectable in their way. But do they often become truly religious? Is it wise to deal thus with God, "the high and lofty One that inhabiteth Eternity, whose Name is Holy,"¹ 1 Isa. lvii. 15. none of whose laws is surer than this, that "whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap ; For he that soweth to his flesh, shall of the flesh reap corruption."² 2 Gal. vi. 7, 8. And even if he do turn and begin to sow to the Spirit, and "find mercy of the Lord in that Day,"³—what trials and difficulties, storms and tempests, hinder this work, which to a large extent he might have avoided, had he begun it early in his days ! But "better late than never"—and it is profitable at any time to sow to the Spirit and to reap life everlasting. For then, when the Son of Man shall come in His glory,⁴ you shall not hear the dreaded words, "Depart from Me, ye cursed," but these words of mercy and love, "Come, ye blessed of My Father !"

Through the mercy and the grace of God, it will most certainly pay to engage in this spiritual husbandry : "For I was an hungered and ye gave Me meat : I was thirsty and ye gave Me drink : I was a stranger and ye took Me in : Naked and ye clothed Me : I was sick and ye visited Me : I was in prison, and ye came unto Me." In gracious humility you may disclaim such a reaping as the fruit of your doings. But the King shall answer and say, verily I say unto you, "Inasmuch as ye have done it unto one of the least of these My brethren, ye have done it unto Me."⁵

* "Down in the human heart, crushed by the Tempter,
Feelings lie buried, which grace can restore ;
Touched by a loving hand, awakened by kindness,
Chords, that were broken, will vibrate once more."

⁴ Matt. xxv. 31-46.

The farmer casts his seed into the ground in the full belief that it will grow. Yet he has no more ground for his belief than you ought to have, when you commit the good seed of the word to your own hearts. There is the promise of God in both cases, and in both cases there is the experience that the seed has in many instances grown up and brought forth fruit. I beseech you, then, by the mercies of God, that without any delay ye sow this good seed—putting faith in the God of grace, the same trust which the farmer has in the God of nature. And do not spare the seed. Into such soil you can hardly put in too much. "He that soweth bountifully shall reap also bountifully."¹ It has grown in the hearts of others, which were probably no better than yours;² and why should it not grow in yours? "To his daughter, who expressed a wish that labour as certainly insured success in spiritual as in temporal affairs, Payson [an American divine of great faith and godliness] said, 'It does: it is just as certain that prayers for spiritual blessings will be answered, whenever God sees best, as that the husbandman who sows his seed with proper precaution will reap. Our endeavours after spiritual blessings are often not made in earnest.'"

Now, if you would only with the same preparedness—if only with the same diligence—commit this good seed into your hearts, there might soon be a corresponding yield of the fruits of righteousness. Nothing good will grow of itself there; the good seed must be sown. And as there is, according to the laws of the God of nature, something in the soil which the seed lays hold on and uses, so according to the laws of the God of

¹ 2 Cor. ix. 6.² 1 Cor. vi. 9-11.

grace there is something in the very constitution of our hearts, ruined as that constitution is, on which the word of His grace can lay hold. This it can use, under the working of Him whose word it is, and so cause our whole nature to flower forth with all that is good and fair: with "Whatsoever things are true, whatsoever things are venerable, whatsoever things are just, whatsoever things are pure, whatsoever things are lovely, whatsoever things are of good report."¹ It is their fault, and not the fault of the word, if the crop of Christian graces and virtues is often so small among those who profess and call themselves Christians. There is often so much slothful and unskilful cultivation, that one might wonder that there should be any crop at all. But "the LORD is merciful and gracious, slow to anger, and plenteous in mercy."²

As I have already said, there must be a human agency in carrying on this spiritual husbandry. Whoever heard of our ordinary farming being carried on without men to do the work? Ministers, Christian friends, and you yourselves, may all be fellow-workers with God. You are not to cast aside this truth in the idea that He will carry on this work in you by dreams and visions and foolish fancies, or even by His divine Spirit, if you neglect the laws which He hath plainly laid down in the kingdom of His grace. But let that good seed be sown with full trust in God, and He will be very sure to make it grow. It will be all the better if you steep it in the tears of repentance and prayer: "Turn us again, O LORD God of hosts, cause Thy face to shine, and we shall be saved."³ "They that sow in tears shall reap in joy." Then the promise will hold

¹ Phil. iv. 8.² Ps. ciii. 8.³ Ps. lxxx. 19.
J. r. xxxi. 18-20.

good: "He that goeth forth and weepeth, bearing precious seed, shall doubtless come again with rejoicing, bringing his sheaves with him."¹ All human life, as related to the larger life of eternity, is a sowing time, and it is largely a sowing time of tears. And it is often a hard and uncomfortable thing, as the farmer often finds his sowing to be in the rough spring-time. But the dew falls, and the rains descend, and the sun shines forth, and the seed springs up—"first the blade, then the ear; and after that, the full corn in the ear."

Without the sowing this could not be. Yet if a farmer lose one season he might retrieve his loss by diligence during the next. But in spiritual things we cannot count upon another season. And if that which God has given us slip away unimproved, what are we to do?

"Life is the season God hath given
To fly from hell and rise to heaven,
That day of grace fleets fast away
And none its rapid course can stay."²

² Par. xv. 2.



II.

MAN AND HIS IGNORANCE.



OW let us note the ignorance on man's part as to the way in which the seed grows up. This is both implied and asserted: "as if"—after casting the seed into the ground, "he should sleep, and rise night and day, and the seed should spring and grow up, he knoweth not how."

This means that he goes about his ordinary occupations. Having committed his seed to the ground, the farmer knows that he can do little more. For it is plain that, if the seed is to grow, it will grow independently of his care and anxiety. But while this is true, he does not carelessly forget that he has sown seed. He often thinks of it. He looks at his field every other day. If the braid is long in appearing, or if its colour is not good, he fears that something is wrong: "Was the crop rightly laid down? Was the seed good?" Then the frost may nip the tender blade, and storms may come—over these he has little or no control; but the Great Husbandman may have ends to serve in sending them,¹ and he must not repine. All he can think of he does

¹ Ps. cxlviii. 8.

for his field, fencing it from cattle and saving it from vermin of every kind. For unless there be a harvest gathering, how can he face the approach of winter?¹

But with all this he cannot make the seed take root, neither can he make it grow. He does not know the secret of its growth. He cannot tell its cause or method. He may analyze the earth, and he may analyze the seed, and he may thus know their separate natures. He may speak learnedly about their "constituent parts"—about lime and carbon and the rest. But he knows not how the seed takes hold of the soil: he cannot tell how the vital principle in the one subdues the other, feeds on it, and manifests itself through it. He sees that the rain and the sunshine are necessary for bringing out the life that is in the seed, but he cannot tell why they are necessary. These he looks for most eagerly, and sometimes impatiently; but how they act he knows not. He simply knows that they do act. For Nature will not lay open her ways of working; she will not tell her deepest secrets.

Nevertheless the farmer casts abroad the precious seed. He hesitates not because of his ignorance. And yet he might say, "I will not scatter my precious grain; I will not cast bushel after bushel of my beautiful corn on these damp, cold, ungenial fields, until I know everything about its manner of growth."

He might as reasonably speak and act thus as do many, who—instead of carefully committing the precious seed of God's word to their hearts, and looking earnestly for the "bright shining of the Sun of righteousness"² and the "plenteous dew of the Holy Spirit"³—raise up many questions about the nature of faith, the manner of

¹ Prov. vi. 6.

² 2 Cor. iv. 6.

³ Zech. viii. 12.

the new birth, electing decrees, differing views of the truth, and such like. They will do nothing, they say, till they settle certain points of doctrine, and until they understand the mysteries of religion. It will then be a very long time indeed ere they do anything. For these mysteries it is not given us fully to understand, any more than it is given us to understand the mysteries of nature. We must be content with "knowledge in part" of the word and the ways of God. O that men would believe and act in things heavenly with as much wisdom as they do in things earthly! That they would deal with the precious seed of God's word as they deal with the corn which without questioning they scatter over their fields!

It is not for us to pry curiously into the mysteries of God's working, and to speculate coldly upon them at a distance from God. "The wind bloweth where it listeth, and thou hearest the sound thereof, but canst not tell whence it cometh, and whither it goeth: so is every one that is born of the Spirit."¹ Let us ever remember the words of "Moses, the man of God:"² "The secret things belong unto the Lord our God; but those things which are revealed belong unto us and to our children for ever, that we may do all the words of this law."³ But if we would draw near to the Lord our God in faith and love, He would give us to understand as much as it is good for us to know of His working in providence and in grace. For "The secret of the Lord is with them that fear Him, and His covenant to make them know it."⁴

There are some, however, who never give a thought to this spiritual farming at all—no more than "the beasts that perish," and, alas! like them they may die:

¹ John iii. 8.

² Deut. xxxiii. 1.

³ Deut. xxix. 29.

⁴ Ps. xxv. 14.

¹ Ps. xlix. 12-14.

"Like sheep they are laid in the grave."¹ In their tilling of the ground they may have knowledge and industry, and they may carry on their work with all kinds of new and ingenious implements. Are they not given to take all the credit to themselves for their success? Do they always remember that God gives them strength and wisdom for their work? Are they not often like the King of Assyria, who said: "By the strength of my hands I have done it, and by my wisdom; for I am prudent"? Let them mark the Lord's indignant reply: "Shall the axe boast itself against him that heweth therewith? or shall the saw magnify itself against him that shaketh it? As if the rod should shake itself against them that lift it up, or as if the staff should lift up itself, as if it were no wood."² Doth the plowman plow all day to sow? doth he open and break the clods of his ground? . . . For his God doth instruct him to discretion, and doth teach him." O my friends, will ye not remember that all your skill in all the works of your hands is from God? . . . "This also," even as the revelation of His grace, "cometh forth from the Lord of hosts, which is wonderful in counsel and excellent in working."³

² Isa. xxviii. 23-29.
Exod. xxxvi. 1, 2.

We are not to make gods of our power, of our wealth, of the implements and the machinery, which the great God of heaven and of earth has enabled us to make or acquire, because by them "our portion is fat and our meat plenteous." And so also ministers of the gospel, as "labourers together with God," in the spiritual much as we have seen ploughmen to be in the natural sphere of working, are in no sense to attribute any of their success

in the ministry to their own learning and goodness, wisdom and skill:—

"Should e'er Thy wonder-working grace
Triumph by our weak arm,
Let not our sinful fancy trace
Aught human in the charm:

"To our own nets ne'er bow we down,
Lest on the eternal shore
The angels, while our draught they own,
Reject us evermore."¹

¹ Cf. Hab. i. 16.

"Thus saith the LORD: Let not the wise man glory in his wisdom, neither let the mighty man glory in his might; let not the rich man glory in his riches; but let him that glorieth glory in this, that he understandeth and knoweth Me, that I am the LORD, which exercise loving-kindness, judgment, and righteousness in the earth: for in these things I delight, saith the LORD."²

² Jer. ix. 23, 24.

They may secure the finest seed in the market for their fields, but do they think of the good seed of the Word for their hearts? Do they use any means for making them better? Do questions about religion, wise or foolish, profitable or unprofitable, ever seriously trouble them? Is not all doctrine, good, bad or indifferent, which they may hear now and then when they do go to church, all the same to them? Does it influence their daily life? Is not this a picture of their spiritual husbandry: "I went by the field of the slothful, and by the vineyard of the man void of understanding, and, lo! it was all grown over with thorns, and nettles had covered the face thereof, and the stone wall thereof was broken down"?³—these thorns and nettles serving well as emblems of "the works of the flesh,"⁴

³ Prov. ix. xxiv. 30, 31.

⁴ Gal. v. 19.

the various forms of immorality too common amongst us. "What fruit had ye at that time in the things of which ye are now ashamed? for the end of those things is death."¹ Many, indeed, who call themselves Christians, are not ashamed of them. Alas! in spite of all our privileges, the word is by no means universally true of our land: "The desert shall rejoice and blossom as the rose."

¹ Rom. vi. 21.

Why not, my friends, turn over a new leaf? There is neither profit nor advantage in such farming. Why not enter into friendship with the Great Husbandman, and at once commit His precious seed to your hearts? You have, under Him, to dress and keep them, as Adam had to dress and keep the garden of Eden—though where is the man whose heart is as the garden of Eden? Your only resource is in the promise of your Lord: "I the LORD do keep it; I will water it every moment: lest any hurt it, I will keep it night and day."² Therefore make no delay. Begin at once, ever looking for His help and blessing, and that blessing will come in His own time:—

² Isa. xxvii. 3.

"Thou visitest the earth and waterest it;
Thou greatly enrichest it;
The river of God is full of water;
Thou providest them corn, when Thou hast so prepared the
earth;
Thou makest it soft with showers;
Thou blessest the springing thereof."³

³ Ps. lxx. 9-11.

If by-and-by there be no appearance of the springing seed in its natural growth of gracious thoughts and words and actions, the farmer must begin his work anew. For the seed, if good, may have been sown in

stony places, or it may have been choked among thorns, or it may have been scattered carelessly by the way-side.¹ And so it could not grow or come to ripeness. But perhaps he mixed it with the bad seed of strange doctrines, infidel sentiments, evil maxims, and the like. Perhaps he went to the wrong market, and took counsel with men who seemed wise, but who knew nothing as they should. "The LORD giveth wisdom; out of His mouth cometh knowledge and understanding."²

¹ Matt. xiii.² Prov. ii. 6.

He must learn wisdom, and do his work better in future. He must have faith in God, who will water the good seed sown with the dews of the Spirit, and call out its hidden life with the genial rays of the Sun of righteousness. Let him persevere in his labour. Let him sow in hope, and never despair of success. Let him take up the seed, and, with God's strength and God's good cheer in his heart restraining his tears, let him go forth to his work; and that work shall have the blessing of God.

"For where the Lord hath planted grace,
And made His glories known,
There fruits of heavenly joy and peace
Are found, and there alone."³

³ Olney Hymns.

And he must do this, although he cannot make it grow in his own heart, or in the hearts of others. In every case, and in every way, "it is God that giveth the increase."⁴ A father may die, but the good seed may afterwards grow in the hearts of his children. A minister may die, or may leave the scene of labours which at the time seemed fruitless, and, long after this,

⁴ 1 Cor. iii. 5-7.

the word he has preached may take effect: the good seed he has scattered may "bring forth plenteously—some an hundredfold, some sixty, some thirty."¹ Other men may come and "gather fruit unto life eternal, that both he that soweth and he that reapeth may rejoice together. And herein is that saying true, One soweth and another reapeth."² But he that soweth shall also reap—only it may be in the days of eternity, wherefore "cast thy bread upon the waters: for thou shalt find it after many days."³ "What is our hope," says St Paul, "or joy, or crown of rejoicing? are not even ye in the presence of our Lord Jesus Christ at His coming? For ye are our glory and joy."⁴

The labourer must not be restless and impatient, for at a certain point his responsibility ceases. But God takes it up. Rather it has lain upon Him all the time, though the labourer may not have thought of it. "Being confident of this very thing, that He which hath begun a good work in you will perform it until the day of Jesus Christ."⁵ For, "Shall I bring to the birth, and not cause to bring forth? saith the LORD: Shall I cause to bring forth, and shut the womb, saith thy God?"⁶ By such want of faith and patience he would rather tempt the Great Husbandman to withhold all blessed influences. And, therefore, when eagerly looking for the growth of the good seed, and earnestly longing for the blessing of heaven, he must be believing, prayerful, and patient. Through the grace of God it takes hold of the heart, finding there a fit field for its working. That working⁷ may begin in the innermost recesses of our nature—so far in that we cannot go and see or understand it. But once there it roots up evil

¹ Matt. xiii. 23.² John iv. 36.³ Eccles. xi. 1.⁴ 1 Thess. ii. 19, 20.⁵ Phil. i. 6.⁶ Isa. lxvi. 9.⁷ Phil. ii. 12, 13.

and the love of it: it implants the love of God, and of all that is good and holy and true. For if evil is a perennial plant, this also is perennial and of greater strength. "For the word of God is living, and active, and sharper than any two-edged sword, and piercing even to the dividing of soul and spirit, of both joints and marrow, and quick to discern the thoughts and intents of the heart."¹ It overcomes the evil and cleanses the heart,² much as a cleansing crop will root out unsightly weeds—as I have seen the tiny white clover root out the heavy fern and the strong and tenacious flax-plant in New Zealand. Without doubt it is a difficult bit of land to take in, and your most successful plan will be to get in such a cleansing crop as soon as possible. And you may as well ask Him who gives the seed-corn to come with it.

But it needs time. The Great Husbandman may indeed shorten the stages through which the seed must pass; or He may hasten its growth, when He sees fit to do so. In His method of working, spring, summer, and autumn may seem to run into one.³ Yet this is not His usual method. And while praying earnestly for the growth of the seed sown, it is not for us to say: "Let Him make speed and hasten His work, that we may see it: and let the counsel of the Holy One of Israel draw nigh and come that we may know it."⁴ Not in the time we fix, but in His own time, He will give us to see as much of His work as is good for us to see, and tell us as much of His counsel, as seemeth good in His sight.⁵

How are we to judge of that growth? Not, I think, by looking too much into the motives and principles of

¹ Heb. iv. 12² [R.V.]³ John xv. 3.⁴ xvii. 17.⁵ Luke xxiii.

39-43.

⁴ Isa. v. 19.⁵ 1 Cor. xiii. 12.

action. Such work is for God alone, who says: "I, the Lord, search the heart, I try the reins, even to give every man according to his ways, and according to the fruit of his doings."¹ For, without disturbing the growth of anything He has sown, He can see into the deepest crevices of the heart, and at once discover the long trailing roots of evil, which may be hindering that growth. Hence, when we stand in awe of his all-searching eye, we ought to make it our prayer: "Search me, O God, and know my heart: try me and know my thoughts; and see if there be any wicked way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting."²

But that is hardly for us the right method of self-examination, or of finding out how the seed is rooting itself and growing in others. What tender plant could bear this continual plucking up by the roots? Can you imagine a farmer putting the rough harrows over his field a week or two after he had sown the seed, just to see if it was doing any good? and time after time repeating the process? Little children may plant flowers in the morning and unearth them in the evening to see if they are growing. In some things we are to be like children, but not in this.³ Such conduct would be childish: the outcome of that "foolishness, which is bound up in the heart of a child."⁴

How would you judge a field of oats? Would it not be by its coming well up, by the strength of stalk, by the colour of the baird, by its generally healthy appearance? In much the same way you ought to estimate spiritual growth. Be cautious, however, in your judgment; for here there may be the appearance of much that is good where there is no substance or

¹ Jer. xvii. 10.

² Ps. cxxxix. 23, 24.

³ Luke xviii. 17; Ps. cxxxi. 2.

⁴ Prov. xxii. 15.

reality. Are you becoming more Christian in word and deed—in life and conduct? Is the fruit of the Spirit beginning to show itself in its various forms—of "love, joy, peace, long-suffering, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, meekness, temperance?"¹ Surely in these you have, or can see the promise of a good crop—more than the promise of fruit unto life eternal.

But if such fruit does not begin to show itself, you may have cause to doubt the success of your spiritual husbandry. And a deal of glib, or of what seems learned talk about it, will not make up for the want of a crop, or prove you to be good farmers.

What would a farmer do if his field thus failed him? You know what he would do better than I do. But I suppose he would go in for sub-soil ploughing, draining, and the like. He would work his land more thoroughly, and make sure of his seed. Top-dressing, which in some circumstances might do good, is hardly the first thing to be done in dealing with sour undrained land.

And so in things spiritual, where we have not a little bad farming. We are too often content with that outward reformation which may be compared to such top-dressing; and with getting quit of a few gross sins, which is like cutting down the rougher thorns and thistles. This surface work we may dignify with fine names, but that does not make it more effective. For the roots in both cases remain, and gather strength, and grow again. But God is not content with such reformation, and sometimes he sends sharp afflictions, and brings near to conscience the dreadful fierceness of His wrath against sin—as if to set fire to these briers and

¹ Gal. v. 22.

thorns, and burn up the unprofitable land and pulverise the cold, hard soil. Then the promise as good seed may take root: "I will put my law in their inward parts and write it in their hearts; and will be their God, and they shall be my people."¹ And with some such convictions and afflictions and trials, He may also harrow in the seed. This work is not ours, but His. He does it, that it may take better hold on the soil and bring forth fruit more abundantly.

I think it would be well to take counsel with the Great Husbandman, and put the whole thing into His hands. He will teach us to trust Him and His working more than we have been doing, and will lead us to a much deeper repentance. Thus our work will be more thoroughly done, and we shall have more success in the time to come. My friends! let us look more than ever for showers of blessing; and for the bright shining of the Sun of righteousness; and, when He sees fit, such fruit will appear as shall be to the praise and the glory of His grace:

"But where the Lord of grace and power
Hath blessed the happy field,
How plenteous is the golden store,
The deep-wrought furrows yield!

"Father of mercies, we have need
Of Thy preparing grace;
Let the same Hand that gives the seed
Provide a fruitful place."²

²Olney Hymns.



III.

THE SEED AND ITS METHOD.



HERE is good reason for casting in the seed, although we know not anything of its growth. "For the earth bringeth forth fruit of herself; first the blade, then the ear, after that the full corn in the ear." God gives the earth this power, and the seed, if committed to its fostering care, will by-and-by show itself. But it will not show itself at the same time in every field, and in some fields it will come up more plentifully than in others. And those fields which are earliest may not always produce the best crops. The nature of the soil and the time of sowing, which may be too early or too late, will tend to such differences as these.

It is much the same in our spiritual husbandry. The heart receives power from God to nourish the good seed of the kingdom. There is a fitness in human nature for such seed, although that nature shows many differences, just as there are many kinds of soil. But here the soil, from the evil working of a wicked husbandman, has been sadly ruined, and is in no case good. Still, if you take counsel with the Great Husbandman and follow His directions, you are sure to succeed. The soil will improve and the seed will grow. It is a cleansing seed: "Sanctify them through thy truth; Thy word is truth."¹ ¹John xvii. 17.

Here there are not many that sow too early, but there are a great many that sow very late—and, alas! some never sow at all. As a rule, the earlier the sowing the better, as the heart can take in the good seed of the Word. Remember this, ye parents, and take an early dealing with the hearts of your children. For, as I have said already, the devil is always busy, whether you are busy or not. In your unwatchfulness you may go to sleep, but this he never does, although he may at times pretend to do so. He is always putting in bad seed, cockle and darnel and such like. The soil is congenial for his working, and he is often left to do as he likes, even in families where one might expect his efforts and influence to be resisted. This is surely unwise: for “the end of those things is death.”¹

¹ Rom. vi. 21.

And as it is with different soils, so it is with the human heart. In some the good seed may lie longer than in others; for the soil, so to speak, may be richer and deeper, and hence it is not always the best that shows itself first. And so, while it is pleasant to see the early ripening of the good seed, we sometimes find that those who are most forward in making a high religious profession are not always those who abound in fruit to the praise of the grace of God.

There may be with such a shallowness, an irreverence, and a noise which it is not pleasant to see and hear. Sometimes the word might be spoken of them: “They sow the wind, and they shall reap the whirlwind: he hath no standing corn: it hath no stalk: the blade shall yield no meal: if so be it yield, strangers shall swallow it up.”² It is little more than a surface growth. “The husks of emptiness rustle in every wind; the full corn

² Hosea viii. 7 (R.V.)

in the ear holds up its golden fruit noiselessly to the Lord of the harvest.” It is often like “the grass upon the housetops, which withereth afore it groweth up; wherewith the mower filleth not his hand, nor he that bindeth sheaves, his bosom.”¹ Time is generally needed for the bringing forth of “the full corn in the ear,”² 6, 7, though the seed in the ground may be quickened in a moment. In like manner the good seed of the word has its time of stirring into life, but it usually needs a long season ere it brings forth “fruit to perfection,”³ ere the heart be as “a field which the Lord hath blessed.”⁴

¹ Ps. cxxix.

² Luke viii. 14.

³ Gen. xxvii.

There is ordinarily no haste, and there is never hurry in God’s greatest and most gracious works. Even in revivals, where He seems, especially to superficial observers, to work so suddenly, there has been in every case much faithful sowing of the good seed, and much prayer for His blessing. In all this He has of His infinite grace engaged His believing people.⁴ In stern judgment, as work wherein He hath no pleasure, there may be such haste. “For the Lord shall rise up as in Mount Perazim, He shall be wroth as in the valley of Gibeon, that He may do His work, His strange work; and bring to pass His act, His strange act. Now, therefore, be ye not mockers, lest your bands be made strong: for I have heard from the Lord God of hosts a consumption, even determined upon the whole earth.”⁵ “He will finish the work and cut it short in righteousness: because a short work will the Lord make upon the earth.”⁶ Wherefore in all His gracious working, “O tarry thou the Lord’s leisure: be strong, and He shall comfort thine heart, and put thou thy trust in the Lord.”⁷

⁴ Ps. lxxv. 6; lxvii. 1, 2.

⁵ Isa. xxviii. 21, 22.

⁶ Rom. ix. 28.

⁷ Ps. xxvii. 14 (Pr. Bk. ver.).

"The earth bringeth fruit of herself," which means that the seed grows without the care and anxiety of man. It does not mean without the providence and the blessing of God. And so it is with the good seed of the kingdom. It grows only by the grace of that kingdom, but, thanks be unto God, this grace is exceeding full and free. You cannot exhaust the treasures of heaven. There is the Sun of righteousness—"the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ."¹ There are showers of blessing, showers that water the earth from the everliving and everloving Spirit of God. Wherefore, "Ask, and it shall be given you"²—according to your manifold need.

¹ 2 Cor. iv. 6.² Luke xi. 9.

"As dew upon the tender herb,
Diffusing fragrance round;
As showers that usher in the spring,
And cheer the thirsty ground:

"So shall His presence bless our souls,
And shed a joyful light;
That hallowed morn shall chase away
The sorrows of the night."³

³ Par. xxx. 5.

But you cannot make the good seed grow; you cannot hasten its growth. In the individual heart as in the Church at large, a Paul may plant and an Apollos water—"it is God that giveth the increase."⁴ In obedience to Him, "the earth bringeth forth fruit of herself." It is for you to see that, while yourselves "God's husbandry," "ye are labourers together with God,"⁵ in the world's great field wherever He hath called you to labour, and that you are sowing His good

⁴ 1 Cor. iii. 7.⁵ 1 Cor. iii. 9.

seed and doing His work there. In His time He will give you to see the springing of the seed, "First the blade, then the ear: after that the full corn in the ear,"—"being filled with the fruits of righteousness, which are by Jesus Christ unto the glory and praise of God."¹ ¹ Phil. i. 11.

"Where'er a streamlet of thy grace is found,
There will the tender flowers and fruits abound."²

² Tholuck.

Now let us mark the order in which this good seed grows. It is "First the blade." There is law and method in this as in all the works of God. Do you expect harvest in spring? Will the braid appear the very day you commit the seed to the ground? Will the ear be formed within a week? the full corn in the ear in a fortnight? Will the corn come before the ear is formed or the braid appear? You know that these things cannot be. Everything is beautiful in its season: "The winter is past, the rain is over and gone; the flowers appear on the earth, the time of the singing of birds is come, and the voice of the turtle is heard in our land."³ "The day is Thine, the night also is Thine; Thou hast prepared the light and the sun. Thou hast set all the borders of the earth; Thou hast made summer and winter."⁴

³ Song ii. 11, 12.⁴ Ps. lxxiv. 16, 17.

We need not try to go against the divine arrangements, although this is sometimes done in spiritual things. We ought not to look for fruit before it has time to grow. At first we should be content with the fair promise. On the other hand, we are not to be content with the fair promise in the green blade, where there should be the ear, and perhaps the full corn in the ear. To everything there is a season. Why should

you look for an old man's religion in a child? How should you expect the religious views and experience suitable to an advanced Christian, "an old disciple,"¹ in one newly come to the faith? Are you to look for the same work from the one as from the other? Again, should we be content with the mere promise of fruit in those who have professed to know the truth for many years? Surely in this case the seed has not got into the ground, or it has grown rank and coarse in the wretched and undrained soil—like "the miry places and the marshes which," the prophet says, "shall not be healed."² Assuredly on them "the Sun of righteousness hath not arisen with healing in his wings."³

Be it yours, my friends, to "receive the truth in the love of it, that you may be saved"⁴—to receive in your inmost hearts the good seed of the kingdom, and so there shall be fruit to the glory and praise of God. May He grant, calling us by His grace, that this good seed may be quickened in all of us, that Christ, His Son, may be revealed in us,⁵ the true "Corn of wheat,"⁶ which through death bringeth forth much fruit!

Then indeed should we gather fruit unto life eternal. We ourselves should be the fruit of that "Corn of wheat." And the fruit which we should gather would be the ever-deepening conviction of sin, of righteousness, and of judgment: pardon, peace, joy, and love:—"Assurance of God's love, peace of conscience, joy in the Holy Ghost, increase of grace, and perseverance therein to the end." Some of this fruit may be rather bitter to the taste, but it is all good for us and healing in its nature. For the Lord Jesus

¹ Acts xxi. 16.² Ez. xlviii. 11.³ Mal. iv. 2.⁴ 2 Thes. ii. 10.⁵ Gal. i. 15.⁶ John xii. 24.

Christ is the only source of life and blessing, even through His death upon the cross. Hence in due time there shall be that new creation, of which He that sitteth on the throne is heard to say: "Behold I make all things new."¹

"Who hath despised the day of small things?"² In almost every matter it is very unwise to do so. Despise not, then, the first beginnings, the slightest workings of the grace of God, the first appearing of the tender blade. Take care of it, nourish it and cherish it, for it is a sensitive plant in the garden of the LORD. He will take care of it and it will grow in His sight. "There shall be showers of blessing,"³ and He will show His "marvellous loving kindness."⁴ For it is "The planting of the LORD that He might be glorified."⁵ And whence or where can be the failure, if His glory is concerned?

Time after time He may give "a little reviving"⁶ to the individual soul and so to the Church at large. At one time His blessing may come as refreshing dew: "I will be as the dew unto Israel: he shall grow as the lily, and cast forth his roots as Lebanon."⁷ At another time there may be cause to sing and give praise: "Thou, O God, didst send a plentiful rain, whereby Thou didst confirm Thine inheritance, when it was weary."⁸ A special time of reviving in the Church may be an early season, a blessed and hopeful time for the world, if it only knew it as the time of its merciful visitation.

And now, "Behold the days come, saith the LORD, that the plowman shall overtake the reaper, and the treader of grapes him that soweth seeds."⁹ But it is not

¹ Rev. xxi. 5.² Zech. iv. 10.³ Ez. xxxiv. 26.⁴ Ps. xvii. 7.⁵ Isa. lxi. 3.⁶ Ezra ix. 8.⁷ Hosea xiv. 5.⁸ Ps. lxxviii. 9.⁹ Amos ix. 13.

for us to reckon up too narrowly the fruit of such visitations, not for us to count one by one the number of converts, unless we do it with caution and on the plain evidence of a life which is becoming new. There may be much leavening of which we can take little note, and many converts who "*go out and weep bitterly.*"¹ Of such it might be said :

"He could not trust his melting soul
But in his Maker's sight."²

² Keble.

This work may be left to the Lord, who will certainly do it in His own time: "And of Zion it shall be said, This and that man was born in her: and the Highest Himself shall establish her. The Lord shall count, when He writeth up the people, that this man was born there."³

³ Ps. lxxxvii.
5, 6.

For "the remnant of Jacob shall be in the midst of many people as a dew from the Lord, as the showers upon the grass that tarrieth not for man, nor waiteth for the sons of men."⁴ What need there is for prayer that this prophecy may be more largely fulfilled,—that all who take the Christian name may carry a blessing with them wherever their lot is cast in the providence of God!

⁴ Micah ii. 7.

But there are frosts and blights and tempests that are hurtful to the growing corn, which God sometimes sends as chastisements upon His servants. It is for us to take heed lest "we provoke Him to anger with our inventions,"⁵ even when we are sowing the good seed of His kingdom. For then He may send such visitations of judgment on our spiritual husbandry: He may withhold the fertilizing rain of the spirit, and deny us

⁵ Ps. cvi. 29;
xcix. 8.

the warning and enlightening rays of the Sun of righteousness. In the deadness of such a season, "when the heaven over our head is brass, and the earth under our feet is iron,"¹ what can we do but mournfully cry: "Will the Lord cast off for ever and will He be favourable no more? Is His mercy clean gone for ever? doth His promise fail for evermore? Hath God forgotten to be gracious? hath He in anger shut up His tender mercies?" Our only hope is that of the Psalmist: "And I said, This is my infirmity; but I will remember the years of the right hand of the Most High. I will remember the works of the Lord; surely I will remember Thy wonders of old. I will meditate also of all Thy works, and talk of Thy doings."² And the merciful God will anew send times of blessing. "They shall revive as the corn, and grow as the vine: the scent thereof shall be as the wine of Lebanon."³

¹ Deut. xxviii.

² Ps. lxxvii. 12.

³ Hosea xiv. 7.

And as it is when the bloom is upon the wheat, when it is passing into ear, when it is taking the form of fruit-bearing, that it is most easily spoiled by canker and frost, so it is at a corresponding stage of spiritual growth that the new life is most apt to suffer loss. And it does often suffer loss through the craft and malice of the devil, through the deceitfulness of the heart, and through the chilling influences of an ungodly world. Sometimes, indeed, it loses its bloom through the unwise dealing of earnest Christians, who force it too much into the light and look for fruit before its proper time of fruit-bearing. This may happen when young people and those newly come to the faith are at once hurried, without any consideration, into work for Christ. And hence there arise

¹ 1 Tim. iii. 6.

temptations to vainglory, vanity, and pride, and they may even "fall into the condemnation of the devil."¹

² Eph. iii. 17.

The right time is not the same for every one, but every one needs to be in so far "rooted and grounded in the love of Christ."² From the want of this, the tender blade looks sere and frost-bitten, and the too early fruit is wan and shrivelled. The beauties of holiness are not there; it cannot be said to them: "Thou hast the dew of thy youth."³ But God will take care of it, and will "command the blessing, even

³ Ps. ex. 3.⁴ Ps. cxxxiii. 3.

life for evermore."⁴

"Let Thy work appear unto Thy servants,
And Thy glory upon their children.

AND LET THE BEAUTY OF THE LORD OUR GOD BE UPON US:

And establish Thou the work of our hands upon us;

Yea, the work of our hands establish Thou it."⁵

⁵ Ps. xc. 16, 17.

Of as Thy Word, O God, is cast, Like seed into the ground,
Let the rich dews of heaven descend And righteous fruits abound.

Let not the ever-watchful foe This holy seed remove,
But give it root in every heart To bring forth fruits of love.

Let not the world's deceitful cares The living Word destroy,
But let it yield a hundred-fold Of peace, and faith, and joy.

—A. M. C.



IV.

THE HARVEST TIME.



HERE is a harvest time: "When the fruit is brought forth, immediately he putteth in the sickle, because the harvest is come." As it is in the natural world, so is it in the spiritual. In the one case, as in the other, there may be an anxious time. For the one as for the other, we might have "long patience" and might follow the example of Elijah, who prayed, "and the heaven gave rain, and the earth brought forth her fruit."¹ Alas! with many, who nevertheless call themselves Christians, there is but little anxiety for the spiritual harvest. But there are others, many more than we know of,—some of them God's "hidden ones"²—who are concerned about the growth of the good seed in themselves and in the world. And whatever the devil and his servants may say or do, however much sin and doubt may lurk in the hearts of His believing people, it shall grow, for God hath said it. Its growth is seen in Christian principles, in kindly and loving work, in gracious speech and in all that which St. Paul speaks of as the "fruit of the Spirit."³

¹ James v. 18.² Ps. lxxxiii. 3.³ Gal. v. 22.

The Great Husbandman will carry on His work: for thus we are to labour and pray. "For as the rain

cometh down and the snow, from heaven, and returneth not thither, but watereth the earth, and maketh it bring forth and bud, that it may give seed to the sower, and bread to the eater : so shall my word be that goeth forth out of my mouth : it shall not return unto me void ; but it shall accomplish that which I please, and it shall prosper in the thing whereto I sent it."¹ And those are "blessed that sow beside all waters,"² who, scatter the good seed broadcast over the world. For the promise is now being fulfilled : "There shall be an handful of corn in the earth, upon the top of the mountains ; the fruit thereof shall shake like Lebanon, and they of the city shall flourish like grass of the earth."³

God looks for fruit, good and ripe fruit—the full corn in the ear. Then he puts in the sickle and gathers it into His garner. How true to nature is this Scripture ! In the harvest time you do the same thing. It may be an early or a late season, or one field may be early and another late—you gather in your crop when it is ripe. In like manner God gathers in His saints, some in the spring-time of their days, and some in the autumn, when He has made them ready, and when they are ripened for the ingathering.

You must have observed how quickly a crop ripens during the last few days it stands in the field, and that, after it is cut down, it ripens into yet fuller maturity. And so we frequently find it in regard to God's believing people. Towards the close of their earthly life there is at times a kind of Indian summer, after many a storm may have passed over their heads. And their fruit is now mellow and sweet. It is more manifestly the fruit of the Spirit, and they themselves and others who see

¹ Isa. lv. 10, 11² Isa. xxxii. 20.³ Ps. lxxii. 16.

them say Amen, when the Great Husbandman says of them : "From me is thy fruit found."¹ They are gathered "like as a shock of corn cometh in in his season."² They say, "As for me, I will behold thy face in righteousness : I shall be satisfied, when I awake, with thy likeness."³ And this : "Beloved, now are we the sons of God ; and it doth not yet appear what we shall be : but we know that when he shall appear we shall be like him, for we shall see him as he is."⁴ And it is said of them : "His servants shall serve him : and they shall see his face, and his name shall be in their foreheads."⁵ May God, in His infinite mercy, grant that there may be a plenteous harvest gathered from this sinful world, and that we ourselves, as part of it, may be treasured in His garner.

There is another gathering in the time of harvest, of which the Householder saith to His reapers : "Gather ye together first the tares, and bind them in bundles to burn them."⁶ The Lord in His mercy forbid that any of us should be thus gathered and given over to such a fate ! O that He, before that harvest-time shall come, may work miracles of grace and turn the tares into wheat ! Then of all such the word might go forth : "Gather the wheat into my barn."

These miracles are wrought, when sinful men are "born again, not of corruptible seed, but of incorruptible, by the word of God, which liveth and abideth for ever."⁷ And so they grow up as "God's husbandry : " and their souls are "bound up in the bundle of life with the Lord their God."⁸

Yet such as are advanced in life need not despair, although they may have been sowing to their flesh

¹ 1 Sam. xxv. 29 ; Col. iii. 3.² 1 Pet. i. 23.³ 1 Hosca xiv. 8.⁴ Job v. 26.⁵ Ps. xvii. 15.⁶ Rev. xxii. 3.⁷ Isa. xvii. 11.⁸ Matt. xiii. 39.

during all their past years. There is hope even for them, if they will only enter into the friendship which the Great Husbandman freely offers them, and begin the work of sowing the good seed in their hearts. For He is very merciful and forgiving, and even at the eleventh hour He will help them to make up for lost time, according to His promise: "I will restore to you the years that the locust hath eaten, the canker-worm, and the caterpillar and the palmer-worm; . . . and ye shall be satisfied, and shall praise the Name of the LORD your God, that hath dealt wondrously with you; and My people shall never be ashamed."¹ Even then they may begin to sow to the Spirit. Their crop may be late, but still there may be time for it to germinate. And if there seem little growth, let them nevertheless trust in the Lord. For the life is in the root, and under fairer skies it shall spring up and grow "in the midst of the paradise of God."²

But if they persist in turning aside from God's counsels,³ and continue "sowing to their flesh," let them take warning: "Be not deceived; God is not mocked: for whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap. For he that soweth to his flesh, shall of the flesh reap corruption; but he that soweth to the Spirit, shall of the Spirit reap life everlasting."⁴ The "flesh" is his own, and so he reaps corruption. The "Spirit" is the Spirit of the everliving God, and so he reaps life everlasting.

They who reap this life are gathered home to the Father's "house of many mansions."⁵ There "they begin to be merry,"⁶ and that with a mirth which knows no ending. Nay rather, it begins when they

¹ John ii. 25.² Rev. ii. 7.³ Prov. i. 24.⁴ Gal. v. 7, 8.⁵ John xiv. 2.⁶ Luke xv. 24, 26.

cast themselves on the mercy and lovingkindness of the Father, and when He draws them to His heart. "When he was yet a great way off, his Father saw him, and had compassion, and ran, and fell on his neck, and kissed him."¹

¹ Luke xv. 20.

But now there is no mingling of sin and sorrow. For it is the true HARVEST-HOME of the people of God, "when they shall come and sing in the height of Zion, and shall flow together to the goodness of the Lord."² "And my people shall be satisfied with my goodness," saith the Lord.³ And "Blessed are they that dwell in Thy house, they will be still praising thee."⁴ For in that home there is the brightness of uncreated light, and the fulness of uncreated love. "Light is sown for the righteous, and gladness for the upright in heart,"⁵ and the seed has borne fruit. And so more than ever there shall be "thanksgiving, and the voice of them that make merry."⁶

² Jer. xxxi. 12³ Ps. lxxxiv. 14⁴ Ps. lxxxiv. 4⁵ Ps. xcvii. 11⁶ Jer. xxx. 19

At this harvest-home every one sings from very joy of heart: "They joy before thee according to the joy in harvest."⁷ Even in this world, which their God has often turned for them into a "valley of blessing," they have had cause to sing: "Praise the Lord: for His mercy endureth for ever."⁸ And on the mount of God, not far distant from that valley of blessing, they sing in yet louder strains the new song of the redeemed: "Worthy is the Lamb that was slain to receive power and riches and wisdom, and strength, and honour, and glory, and blessing:" yea, "Blessing and honour and glory and power be unto him that sitteth upon the throne, and unto the Lamb for ever and ever."⁹ Then the promise is fulfilled to its utmost extent: "The ransomed of the LORD

⁷ Isa. ix. 3.⁸ Ps. xcvii. 11⁹ Rev. v. 12, 13.

shall return and come to Zion with song, and everlasting joy upon their heads : they shall obtain joy and gladness,

¹ Isa. xx.v. 10. and sorrow and sighing shall flee away."¹

"BLESSED ARE THEY WHICH ARE CALLED UNTO
² Rev. xix. 9. THE MARRIAGE SUPPER OF THE LAMB."²

"The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you. My
³ 1 Cor. xvi. love be with you all in Christ Jesus. Amen."³
23, 34.

CHRIST is risen, CHRIST the first fruits
Of the holy harvest field,
Which will all its full abundance
At His second coming yield ;
Then the golden ears of harvest
Will their heads before Him wave,
Ripened by His glorious sunshine
From the furrows of the grave.

CHRIST is risen, we are risen ;
Shed upon us heavenly grace,
Rain, and dew, and gleams of glory
From the brightness of Thy face ;
That we, with our hearts in heaven,
Here on earth may fruitful be,
And by angel-hands be gathered,
And be ever, LORD, with Thee.

—BISHOP WORDSWORTH (Lincoln).

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HARVEST HYMN.

COME, ye thankful people, come,
Raise the song of harvest-home !
All is safely gathered in,
Ere the winter storms begin ;
God, our Maker, doth provide
For our wants to be supplied :
Come to God's own temple, come,
Raise the song of Harvest-home !

All this world is God's own field,
Fruit unto His praise to yield ;
Wheat and tares together sown,
Unto joy or sorrow grown ;
First the blade, and then the ear,
Then the full corn shall appear :
Lord of harvest, grant that we
Wholesome grain and pure may be.

For the Lord our God shall come,
And shall take His harvest home :
From His field shall in that day
All offences purge away ;
Give His angels charge at last
In the fire the tares to cast ;
But the fruitful ears to store
In His garner evermore.

Even so, Lord, quickly come,
Bring Thy final harvest home ;
Gather Thou Thy people in,
Free from sorrow, free from sin,
There, for ever purified,
In Thy garner to abide :
Come, with all Thine angels, come,
Raise the glorious Harvest-home !

—ALFORD.

shall return and come to Zion with song, and everlasting joy upon their heads : they shall obtain joy and gladness, and sorrow and sighing shall flee away."¹

¹ Isa. lxxv. 10.

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Raise the glorious Harvest-home !

—ALFORD.



*"Ye generous Britons! venerate the plough;
And o'er your hills and long-withdrawing vales,
Let autumn spread his treasures to the sun
Luxuriant and unbounded!"*

THOMSON.



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TITLE**